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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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LEARNING ABOUT CONSERVATION

By Doing What Comes Naturally. Watching seeds grow, making rain at home, measuring a tree, building an insect zoo, developing a nature trail...besides having potential as interesting and fun things to do, these activities can teach young people about conservation of natural resources. They are among more than twenty activities suggested for fun and conservation education in a new publication from USDA's Forest Service. The booklet, especially designed for leaders of youth groups, gives the step-by-step instructions on how to do the projects, along with information on how each activity relates to conservation or fits into the natural scheme of things. Activities include experiments on the fundamental science behind conservation, ideas for building informative exhibits, getting the community involved in conservation, and just plain fun projects. The title of the booklet is "Activities for Learning About Conservation of Forest Resources: A Guide for Leaders of Youth Groups" (PA-1214). Single free copies are available to youth group leaders, teachers, and others working with young people by writing to: Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 2417, Washington, D.C. 20013. Bulk copies are available for \$1.30 each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

SHOCKING RESEARCH

Produces Tender Meat. If you get a charge out of eating a tender beef steak, it may be because the steak got the charge first. Research conducted by scientists of USDA's Science and Education Administration (SEA) indicates that beef carcasses given an electric shock produce more tender meat than do traditionally chilled carcasses. According to the SEA researchers, a 2- to 3-minute shock, applied by passing electricity between probes in each end of the carcass, speeds up the onset of muscle stiffening and prevents excessive shortening of muscle fibers. It is the excessive shortening of muscle fibers that causes tougher meat. Other advantages are gained, too. Electrically-shocked meat can be removed from the carcass in less than four hours as compared to 16 to 24 hours for carcasses chilled in the traditional manner. This can mean savings in labor, chilling costs, and storage space--and fresher meat for consumers. Another plus is that meat receiving the shock treatment has a brighter, more uniform color. One caution: cattle must be calm before slaughter for the shock treatment to work. The scientists found that if cattle are frightened or stressed in some way before slaughter, electric shock has no effect on meat tenderness.



Ready And Available. During and after year-end holiday feasting, you may think you never want to see food again. But eating is a hard habit to break. There must be some attention paid to what to have for those ordinary everyday three-squares--or two-rounds or five-rectangles--whatever is your eating lifestyle. USDA has some go-together publications that can help make the task of selecting and preparing food a bit easier and more of a jolly job. For instance, there is "How To Buy Eggs" with information on egg grades and tips on buying eggs (G-144) and "Eggs In Family Meals" (G-103) with recipes and suggestions for serving eggs. Other companionable titles include:

- How To Buy Beef Steaks (G-145)
- How To Buy Beef Roasts (G-146)
- How To Buy Beef For Your Freezer (G-166)
- Beef And Veal In Family Meals (G-118)
- How To Buy Canned And Frozen Vegetables (G-167)
- Home Care Of Purchased Frozen Foods (G-69)
- How To Buy Fresh Vegetables (G-143)
- Vegetables In Family Meals (G-105)

Single free copies of any of the booklets are available from Publications Division, Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

Tied Together With Trade. Supersonic travel and satellite communications are not the only things that help make our world smaller. International agricultural trade plays an important role as a world shrinker, figuratively speaking. Brazil, Colombia and Nigeria are as near as your morning cup of coffee; Madagascar, India and Indonesia provide the pepper in your shaker. Pie eaten by a Canadian or a Frenchman may well have been made from fruits grown and dried in the U.S.; a shirt worn in Japan likely was made from U.S. cotton. In fact, cotton is a real globetrotter. For instance, U.S. cotton goes to Korea where it is made into finished garments for export to the U.S. The ins and outs of agricultural trade are the main interests of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). A primary function of FAS is to encourage the use of American agricultural products abroad and to bring together U.S. exporters with importers in foreign countries. One way FAS helps is to provide American exporters with information on what foreign importers want. Some of the items are as everyday as cotton and dried fruits; some can be classified as "unusual." Recently, Egypt wanted chewing gum; Bolivia wanted fertilized trout eggs for a hatchery at 15,000 ft. above sea level; Italy wanted zoo animals; and Japan wanted canned sukiyaki--which completes some kind of circle since sukiyaki is a dish we learned about from Japan. Truly, the tie that binds us together is trade.

MINK MEMO

Fur Ever Lovely. There are 1,034 mink ranches in the U.S. This is about 2 percent more than in 1977. These mink ranches turned out 3.1 million pelts in 1977, about 2 percent more than the previous year, and the number of pelts produced in 1978 was estimated to be about 4 percent more than in 1977. The average price of a pelt slipped from \$29 in 1976 to \$28.40 in 1977. Pondering the increases in pelts and the drop in prices, if something mink was not among your Christmas gifts, best query your potential mink gift source.

COST OF FOOD AT HOME FOR A WEEK (OCTOBER 1978)

	Thrifty plan	Low-cost plan	Moderate- cost plan	Liberal plan
FAMILIES				
Young couple.....	\$26.20	\$34.10	\$42.80	\$51.30
Elderly couple.....	23.40	30.40	37.60	44.90
Family of 4 with preschool children.....	36.90	47.50	59.30	71.00
Family of 4 with elementary school children.....	44.40	57.30	71.80	86.10
INDIVIDUALS*				
Women				
20-54 years.....	10.70	13.90	17.30	20.60
55 years and over.....	9.70	12.50	15.40	18.30
Men				
20-54 years.....	13.10	17.10	21.60	26.00
55 years and over.....	11.60	15.10	18.80	22.50
Children				
1-2 years.....	5.90	7.50	9.30	11.00
3-5 years.....	7.20	9.00	11.10	13.40
6-8 years.....	9.10	11.70	14.60	17.50
9-11 years.....	11.50	14.60	18.30	22.00
Girls 12-19 years.....	10.90	13.90	17.30	20.60
Boys 12-14 years.....	12.20	15.50	19.50	23.30
15-19 years.....	13.50	17.20	21.60	25.90

* Cost of food at home for any family can be figured by totaling costs shown for individuals of sex and age of various members of the family as follows:

- o For those eating all meals at home (or carrying some meals from home), use amounts shown.
- o For those eating some meals out, deduct 5 percent from amount in table for each meal not eaten at home. Thus, for a person eating lunch out 5 days a week, subtract 25 percent or one-fourth the cost shown.
- o For guests, include for each meal eaten, 5 percent of amount shown in table for the proper age group.

Next, adjust the total figure if more or fewer than four people generally eat at the family table. Costs shown are for individuals in 4-person families. Adjustment is necessary because larger families tend to buy and use foods more economically than smaller ones. Thus, for a 1-person family, add 20 percent; 2 persons, add 10 percent; 3, add 5 percent; 4, use as is; 5 or 6, subtract 5 percent; 7 or more, subtract 10 percent.

Note: The publication "Family Food Budgeting for Good Meals and Good Nutrition," Home and Garden Bulletin No. 94, describes USDA's thrifty food plan (used in setting the coupon allotment in the Food Stamp Program) and the three more costly plans, on which these costs are based. Single copies are available from the Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Request publication by name and number and include your ZIP code.

HAVING YOUR SAY

About Competitive Foods. Three meetings have been scheduled by USDA to hear public comments on a proposal to restrict competitive foods in schools. Competitive foods are defined as those sold in competition with the Type A lunch required in the National School Lunch Program. The meetings were announced following a withdrawal by USDA of an April 1978 proposal to restrict the sale of candy, soda water, frozen desserts and chewing gum in schools until after the last school lunch period. Some 2,100 comments were received on the April proposal with 82 percent in favor of the regulation or some variation of it and 18 percent opposed to it. However, USDA officials said the comments raised some significant issues which deserve additional public scrutiny. Hence, the public meetings which will focus on developing competitive food standards that consider nutrition education, health, eating habits and the local administration of and impact on the school food programs. Dates, sites and contacts for the meetings are as follows: Jan. 30, Nashville, Tenn., (404) 881-4259; Feb. 6, Detroit, Mich., (312) 353-1044; Feb. 13, Seattle, Wash., (415) 556-4951. Check local news media for times and places. If you cannot attend the meetings, written comments may be sent by Feb. 16 to Margaret O'K Glavin, Director, School Programs Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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